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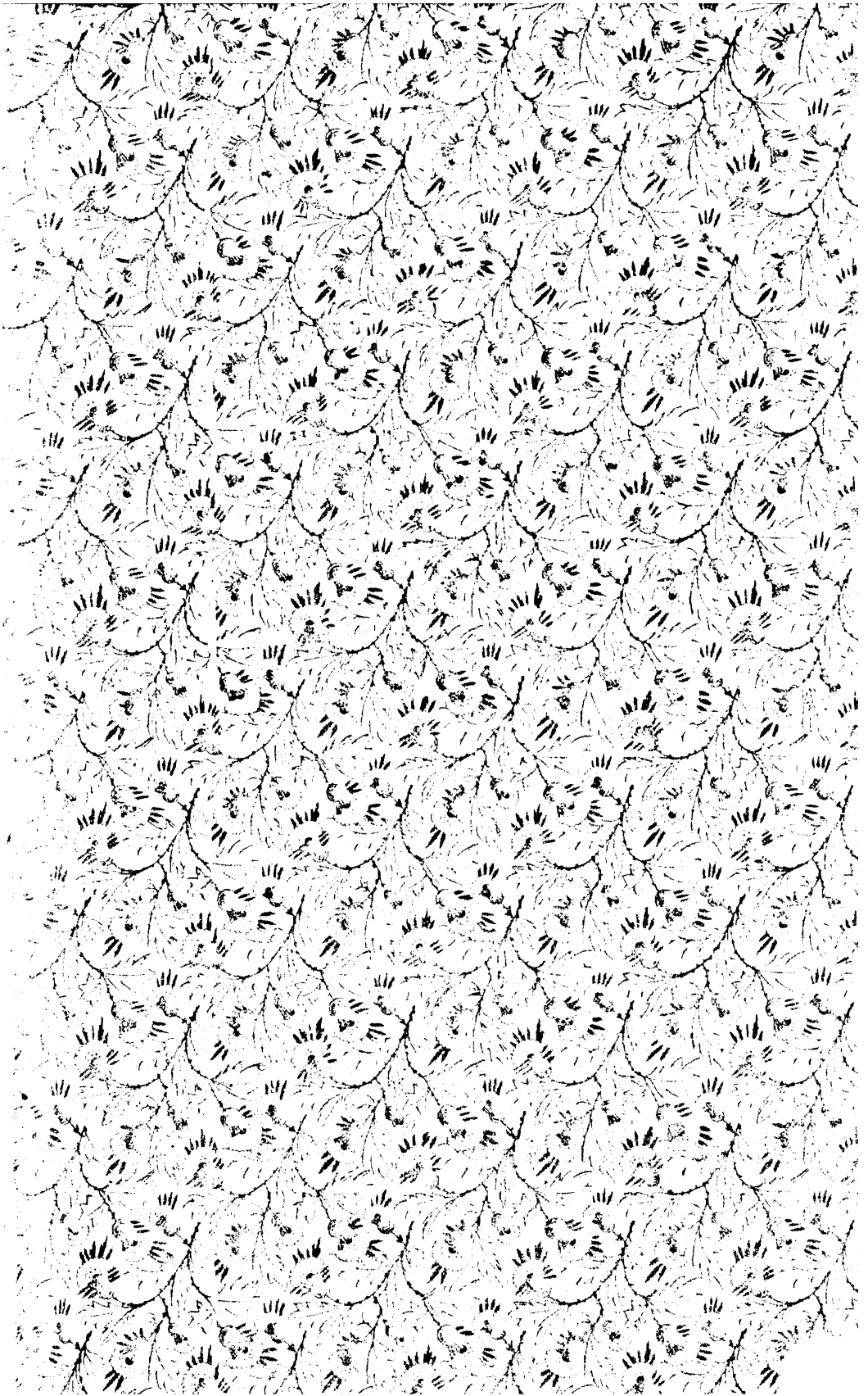
W. H. Gardner
Classical Learning
and Eloquence—
By William Howard Gardner—
Phi Beta Kappa Oration
Aug. 28, 1834—

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AN
ADDRESS,
DELIVERED BEFORE THE 44034
PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY
OF
HARVARD UNIVERSITY,
28 AUGUST, 1834,
ON
CLASSICAL LEARNING AND ELOQUENCE.

By WILLIAM HOWARD GARDINER,
COUNSELLOR AT LAW.

Quid voveat dulci nutricula majus alumno,
Quàm sapere, et fari ut possit quæ sentiat?
Hor. Ep. I. iv. 8.

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ADDRESS.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN :

Every speaker, who addresses any assembly for whatever purpose in the present crisis of affairs, is strongly tempted to find his theme in that all-absorbing subject, national politics. But the occasion of a literary festival (may I not say the chief literary festival of New England ?) held in this seat of learning, by an association of lettered men, demands that something should be done or attempted for the cause of letters.

Conscious of my poor ability to do justice to this cause in any of its wide-spread relations, I approach the subject with great diffidence ; and should gladly have avoided altogether this honorable responsibility, had I any more acceptable excuse than that pressure of other affairs, which, being common to all of us, should be lightly pleaded by none. Strange as it may seem to many, it is a fact which some at least who hear me will feel to be true, that a profession justly ranked among the learned and the liberal, and which involves the exercise of public speaking of a certain kind, almost disqualifies those who are actively engaged in its practice from speaking before critics and

men of letters on the great questions of literature and philosophy. In the more elevated walks of the legal profession, how engrossing and exclusive are its pursuits ! And as it is actually practised among us, with no division of its manifold labors, it were difficult for any but a lawyer to conceive how much of this liberal and glorious art is merely mechanical ; — how much of life is wasted in the drudgery of forms, and how much in the hard study of trivial facts, a species of learning not deserving the name of knowledge, and which, when once used, we are studious only to forget. Years so spent may sharpen the faculties ; but they neither fill nor elevate the mind. Men thus occupied cannot, or at least ordinarily do not, keep pace with the literary progress of the world. They turn their thoughts habitually into no such channels. Nor is this the worst. The more elegant acquisitions of youth are, alas ! too often neglected and too soon forgotten. All the bright trains of ideas, rich as a Roman triumph, which were wont to rise spontaneously in the mind freshly filled with classical associations, exhilarated by the noble sentiments, warmed by the poetic imagery, and inspired by the godlike eloquence of antiquity, will be found to have fled, like a dream, with the habits which produced them, and the very memory of the materials out of which they were formed. Whenever, therefore, a practical lawyer shall have been induced by your call to quit the forum for this place, more appropriate to scholars and men of literary renown, it would be wise in him, not to depart more widely from the usual forensic track than the occasion may absolutely require.

Impressed with such sentiments, I propose to submit for your indulgent consideration a plain argument upon a practical subject, which I have much

at heart, and which seems to me of great common concern.

I complain ; — I complain, that the spirit of the age, and, I fear, the spirit of our government, and, I am sure, the present habits and impulses of society among us, notwithstanding the fine things which have been said of it (partly by ourselves), are adverse to the growth and cultivation of the more delicate and finer species of literature. I complain especially, that classical literature is little cultivated ; less cultivated than it was ; not absolutely, perhaps, but compared with the advancement of other things ; — it is not loved, it is not followed, as it used to be ; — nay, I fear that at this moment it is barely in repute among us. I complain that education is not what it should be in this respect, even here in the midst of the flourishing schools of New England (in general our just boast), and in this enlightened age, which so vaunteth itself beyond its predecessors. And I charge you who have any lingering love of classical literature, all who regard the great common cause of letters, all who have at heart the real welfare and substantial reputation of our country, I charge you all, as you love that country and her institutions and those children whom you hope shall inherit them, that you look carefully and candidly at the actual condition and prospects of our literary affairs. Grave questions are involved. Let them be well weighed.

We live in an age of great mental activity and excitement. Long intermission of general wars has turned the industry of the whole human family to the cultivation of the arts of peace in a degree never before known. The waste places of the earth are made productive, — her farthest regions explored. The most valueless substances of nature are turned, as by the

wand of a magician, into the finest fabrics and the most glorious structures. The products of every soil, the manufactures of every nation, are on the wings of all the winds, traversing the remotest seas to administer to the luxuries of civilized life. New wants grow out of abundance ; and these are daily developing new resources for inexhaustible supplies. New means of motion and transportation are rapidly changing the relations of things. Space is contracted, time is multiplied, by the astonishing results of mechanical contrivance ; and invention is still on the rack to facilitate yet farther, and accelerate yet faster, the intercourse of man and man. The press, too, is at work with a celerity and productiveness hitherto unparalleled. By this freedom of intercourse and communion among men, wealth and knowledge are everywhere accumulated and rapidly diffused. These are power ;—and they are now everywhere in the hands of the people. They bring with them aspirations after liberty. There is a general craving of unsatisfied desires,—an universal uneasiness under the control of ancient dynasties and established systems. Each succeeding change and modification in the forms of European government is narrowing the prerogative of hereditary rulers, and throwing more power into the hands of the people ;—and the people, intoxicated with these first delicious draughts of liberty, like Homer's giant draining the bowls of Ulysses, still cries, in a voice which shakes the monarchs of Europe on their thrones, "More! give me more!"

The same craving of the people for power demands that knowledge should be dealt out to them in the cheapest and most accessible forms. Popular associations for the diffusion of knowledge, aided by mechanical improvements in the press and in the produc-

tion of its materials, are everywhere contributing to this great end. The price of a venerable folio a few years since, now furnishes a moderate library of modern duodecimos; and penny magazines, pamphlets, and newspapers are almost gratuitously distributing light and intelligence into the veriest outskirts and corners of society. The learned are no longer a class separated from the rest of the world. In the most enlightened countries of Europe, and more emphatically in America, it may be said that all men are lettered. Degrees of learning only distinguish them, — and in respect of literary wealth, as with the wealth of commerce, the ranks of society now rise by insensible gradation, from the yeoman who gleans his scanty and occasional repast out of some weekly newspaper, to those prodigies of learning quaintly termed walking libraries, whose lives have been spent in accumulating untold treasures. But the mass of mankind, in their present state of intellectual developement, are like children first let into the rudiments of knowledge; incapable of abstract reasoning, unable to relish refinements of literature, yet eager for novelty and curious of facts, — plain, downright, palpable, substantial knowledge, adapted to their capacities, and not greatly elevated above their standard of taste. As the tendencies of the age are all popular, the energies of human intellect have been mainly directed to the conquest of the material world, where every trophy tells; and physical science has put in requisition all her infinite resources to effect those wonderful discoveries and amazing mechanical inventions, which are the striking phenomena of the times. In all the subdivisions of natural philosophy vast accessions have been made, and are yet making, to the immense stores accumulated in the hands of successive generations from the moment that letters were invent-

ed to record the knowledge and transmit the experience of man. To say nothing of others, the geographer has extended the limit of his knowledge almost as far as seems practicable to man, and is yet laboring, through regions of thick-ribbed ice and burning sand, to accomplish the perfect exhibition and description of the whole terraqueous globe ; and astronomy has not only unravelled the intricate motions of the nearer lights of heaven, demonstrating the immutable perfection of the laws which govern and hold together the whole planetary system, but has penetrated far into regions of undiscovered space, and brought new and unknown systems of luminaries to the eye of man, seeming to extend by her far gaze the unfathomable depths of infinity, and to multiply the already countless multitudes of visible worlds. There is observable, too, a growing disposition, under the influence perhaps of sound philosophy, to reduce every thing in nature to the operation of mechanical causes. The chemist, for example, begins to suspect that the laws of his science, heretofore held to be peculiar, depend merely on the mechanical action of particles infinitely minute, yet various in size and shape, composing the substances which he analyzes and compounds. Even the intellectual philosophy of the day partakes of this tendency. Not only has the metaphysician begun to pause upon ultimate facts, but a new school has arisen, now neither small nor contemptible ; their master, at least, who sleeps in yonder cemetery, "by strangers honored and by strangers mourned," was esteemed, by those who knew and loved him, no unphilosophical observer of mankind ; — yet these men teach, that the very operations of the soul are in some measure effects of mechanical causes. They tell us, that the human brain is a species of thinking machine, or rather a combina-

tion of machines ; and, pointing out minute portions of its organized substance, some

“ In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
On the forefinger of an alderman,”

confidently declare, that *this* little structure contains all the delicate watchwork which tunes the poet's numbers, and *that* the complicated apparatus which enables the astronomer to span the heavens and the earth.

The same influences characterize the literature of the day, which is therefore chiefly concerned in the narration of facts. History, travels, biography, descriptions of the earth, its various regions and productions, the materials of which it is composed, the creatures which dwell on its surface and in its depths, these, with treatises more or less developing the principles of natural and mechanical science, and accounts of its discoveries and inventions, form the great bulk of modern literary productions. Add to these, treatises on government, laws, political economy, education, means of diffusing knowledge and improving the condition of the people, and you have almost the whole of the greater literature of the time. If you look for modern belles-lettres, you must go to the reviews, the magazines, and the literary newspapers. The fine arts, even those partaking somewhat of mechanism, as painting and sculpture, may be said to exist rather than to flourish. Poetry, where is it ? The drama, how is it degraded ! Oratory, what a garrulous narrator of solid facts is it become ! The only imaginative class of composition, which seems really called for by the taste of the times, is the historical romance, the great literary invention of our day ; and this, perhaps, owes its popularity in part to the slight admixture of fact which seasons a volume of fable, as well as to the extraordinary enchantment

breathed into its texture by the genius of its wonderful inventor.

The great characteristic of our literature, then, is its plain, direct, practical utility. What? is this your subject of complaint? Not exactly. The complaint is not, that most of our literature is plainly, directly, and practically useful, but that there is something too much of this for the entire body of a literature; and that, as a whole, it wants the proportion, grace, beauty, grandeur, and expression, which belong to the literature of other periods. Not that it is too useful, but that it takes too narrow a view of utility; and that it would in truth be far more useful to man, as a moral and intellectual being, if it consulted refinement of taste and elevation of sentiment, as much as it informs the understanding and enlarges the circle of knowledge. It is a healthy and substantial literature in the main, answering most, but by no means all the purposes of life. Wholly to discard the ornamental and the imaginative from our intellectual being is much like reducing animal nature from the luxuries of civilization to the bare necessities of life. Man may subsist on acorns, like the brutes that perish. He may clothe himself in their skins, instead of the costly fabrics of modern luxury. Their dens would afford him shelter;—why should he build piles of masonry? Because, living like a brute, he becomes brutal. And on the other hand he is so civilized and humanized, we may say, by luxury, that the highest degree of refinement in the arts of life which is consistent with the moral energy of man, and leaves him a free agent, is that which conducts him to his acme of physical perfection. Does not the analogy hold in respect to the food and raiment of the mind? Imagine, if you can, the literature of our language all cut down to the literal narration of facts and statement

of truths in plain, intelligible parts of speech. Perhaps we should not be justified in saying that what remained was utterly useless ; but surely this poor, mangled, mutilated trunk would bear no better comparison, for usefulness as well as for beauty, with the luxuriant and varied growth of the whole eloquent literature of England, than the life of the savage does to that of civilized man in all its comfort and elegance of refinement. It is, — but I forbear ; — to press this argument would but insult the audience I address.

To this *hyper-practical* character of the literature of this century may be added its revolutionary spirit, analogous to that which pervades the political world. In the universal freedom of inquiry and ardor of reform, nothing is so respectable as to command veneration ; nothing so sacred as to escape rude handling. Men seem to fear legitimacy in letters almost as much as in civil and religious government. All authority is questionable. All restraint intolerable. Criticism has no principles ; art no rules. Those classical idols which were once superstitiously worshipped, and afterwards, with juster appreciation, esteemed worthy of all admiration and respect, are now, by the many, disdainfully trodden to the earth. Chaos broods over the ruins. Every man of moderate genius strikes out for himself a new system, and enacts his own laws. Take the leading poets, for example, who have flourished within the present century. Shakspeare and Pope were not more dissimilar in the structure of their poetry than any two of these cotemporaries. What have they in common, besides the novelty of their systems, and consentaneous departure from the elder schools ? They have each their respective adherents and admirers. But which of them has with him the voice of the whole literary public ? For inventive prose, Scott stands

unique in his excellence, with the extraordinary merit of having given birth to a new species of fiction which commends itself to universal approbation. He has in truth founded a school ; which, besides the models of the master, has already sent into the world many agreeable productions of secondary genius, as well as a vast heap of intolerable trash. There is good writing, it must be acknowledged, in much of the plain business composition of the day, the narrative and the argumentative. But, quitting this for the more ambitious kinds of composition, we find the great mass of modern fine writing, from Bulwer's novels down to Blackwood's Magazine, worthy of ~~all~~ condemnation for its vile and vitiated taste both in sentiment and diction ; — a false, glaring, exaggerated, startling style, adapted, it may be, for popular effect, but making the judicious grieve. And this may be set down for the first fruits of the revolutionary spirit in literature.

The tendencies of the age naturally develop themselves strongly in this republican soil.

The great ancient philosopher of England observed, that "in the youth of a state arms do flourish ; in the middle age of a state, learning ; and then both of them together for a time. In the declining age of a state, the mechanical arts and merchandise." But what would Bacon have said to the prospects of a nation, which stepped into being an armed adult ; born with the wisdom of age ; a formed language already on her tongue ; the whole literature and science of an ancient state delivered into her hands to use as her own ; and instantly pushing, with the vigor of youth, to a degree of perfection in the mechanical arts and commerce, which rivals that of the oldest and wealthiest kingdoms of the earth ? The destinies of such a nation are a new problem in the history of man. It may be, that she

will abuse her great gifts. It may be, that she is destined to terminate a short and brilliant career by some suicidal dismemberment of her great territory ; by internal dissensions and civil wars ; by sudden and blind abandonment of the great principles on which her existence was founded ; by some Agrarian sweep of democracy, desolating and subverting the whole fabric of society ; or by passive acquiescence in the gradual encroachments of arbitrary power and official corruption. But in vain do we look for that premature decrepitude, those symptoms of gradual and necessary decay, which a high degree of perfection in commerce and the useful arts was anciently supposed to indicate. Starting with these as the gifts of infancy, or the attainments of the first steps in our national existence, if that existence be not suddenly and violently terminated by our own hands, if the growth of the nation is indeed to be commensurate with her territory, and the whole of this vast continent to be filled with one republican people, experience cannot tell, nor imagination conceive, the pitch of greatness and glory, civilization, knowledge, and power, to which the genius of such a people, wisely directed by efficient and liberal systems of education, in letters as well as science, might not be conducted in the long progress of prosperous and honorable years.

It was the remark of another philosophic observer of human affairs, that "a republic is most favorable to the growth of the sciences, and a civilized monarchy to that of the polite arts." A reason is assigned. It is, that in a republic talent looks downward to the people for its reward, and therefore seeks to become useful ; while in a monarchy it looks upward, through successive gradations of arbitrary ranks, to the throne as the ultimate fountain of honor, and therefore aims

at the agreeable. Hume had, no more than Bacon, the example of America to guide his inductions. But, if our progress to the present point of our history had been spread before his eyes, would it have brought his mind to a different conclusion? Would he not rather have derived from it corroboration of his theory? Has it not been true, from the first to the present moment of our political existence, that the governing principle which pervades all our institutions, characterizes all our pursuits, and moulds the whole habit of society, is direct utility to the great body of the people? And, wisely understood, ought it not to be true? Is it not the very essence of the theory of our government? Is it not true also, and a probable consequence from the admitted truth, that our attainments in science, and especially in those departments of science which bear most directly on the practical business of life, have been far more considerable than our attainments in literature, and what are termed the polite arts.

The day has indeed gone by when we were tauntingly asked who ever heard of an American book. The day has not yet arrived when we could reasonably be required to exhibit a body of literature to compare with that of nations who were ancient at our birth. It may at least be said, without vanity, that such literature as we have is generally respectable of its kind; that much of it will bear favorable comparison with similar literature abroad; while some has received the *imprimatur* of European approbation. On the other hand may it not be conceded, that during the half-century of our existence we have produced little, and of that little nothing which we ourselves esteem a great national work, on which we would willingly stake our reputation as rivalling the best literary productions of the same period abroad? We shall not indeed be

asked who has ever heard of an American artist, so long as some of the most eminent of the artists in England are and have been Americans. But is not the fact of their voluntary exile the most flagrant of proofs that genius in the fine arts is not yet sufficiently rewarded at home? On the other hand take a brief retrospect of the effects of American science during the same fifty years, and especially of physical and mechanical science. Do you ask, what has America done for science? Where are the monuments of her skill? Look abroad over her vast continent; consider the magnitude of her growth in this little point of time; her feebleness, her poverty, her destitution of internal resources but fifty years ago, and now her wealth and strength, her commerce, her manufactures, her agricultural product, her cities, her mines, her roads, her canals, her rivers and lakes covered with steam-boats, the ocean with her ships, and reflect how much of science is involved in the contrivance and conduct of this vast and complicated machinery, and how much of this unexampled exhibition of national prosperity is the direct consequence of mechanical ingenuity and the skilful application of physical philosophy to the business of life. Ask what America has done! Why, passing by all minor matters, the successful application of steam to locomotion, begun in America, here perfected for purposes of navigation, extended in England recently to movements upon land, is the single great invention of the age, likely to produce a change as momentous in the relations of human affairs, as the invention of gunpowder or the mariner's compass. A whole continent traversed by men and merchandise in less time than it took in the days of Pericles to communicate between Athens and Sparta, or in the time of Elizabeth to send a courier from London to Edinburgh!

It is in effect as if all the wealth, power, and population, spread over this immense territory, were drawn into the narrow compass of the Grecian Peloponnesus, or the little island of England, or the spot called Massachusetts. Whither then are fled the imagined difficulties and dangers of governing a wide-spread republic? Extent of territory ceases to be weakness. Magnitude is no longer unwieldy. Distance is scarcely separation. For, in relation to extent of empire, the true inquiry should be not how many miles, but how many hours is it from place to place; — and, if we would form some adequate idea of the amazing progress of this cementing and consolidating principle, facility of intercourse, take a single fact for illustration. At the commencement of our revolution, Washington moved to the command of the American armies, from Philadelphia to the very place where we are now assembled, with all the expedition which the means of the country could afford for himself and his train, and with no unusual cause of delay beyond a few hours of necessary retardation on the road in briefly declining the proffered civilities of places through which he passed, and he reached this point of his destination on the twelfth day from his departure; — the twelfth day! Even his despatches to Congress by single messengers, resting neither day nor night, were five or six days traversing this route; — and the same journey would now have been accomplished by the aid of the American steam-boat, moving without intermission and without fatigue, in less than thirty hours; — and this time, short as it is, seems not unlikely to be reduced one half, when the British application of the same locomotive power shall have been extended by rail-roads over the whole route. What an union and concentration is this of the scattered energies of a vast republic! But what

have we done in literature, or the polite arts, which, on comparison with European productions, we would name in the same day with these effects of mechanical science?

Let us admit then, that, so far as our short history can enlighten us, the tendency of our government is strongly, most strongly, to foster the useful; and neglect what is termed for distinction's sake the ornamental of life. And must it not be so? not so much for the somewhat fanciful reason of Hume, that talent looks downward in a republic and upward in a monarchy, as from the equal distribution of property among us. It is wealth, not monarchy, which begets luxury; superfluous accumulated wealth, permanent in the same hands, hereditary and entailed, educating a race capable of appreciating, with the means of indulging in expensive refinements; this it is, which creates an atmosphere genial to the fine arts. And literature of the higher kinds, that which is adapted to the gratification of the highly cultivated few, and not to the necessities of the many, a great, a magnificent national literature, rests on the same foundation.

All the habits of society with us are formed and controlled by these causes. We are pushed rapidly forward at an early age into active scenes; immersed before maturity in the business of life. There we are all working men, engaged in plain, practical pursuits. Commerce and navigation, manufactures, civil engineering, and the professions, with education pursued as a business, I had almost said as a trade, and that mostly as a thing by the way, a temporary pursuit, a step to some more lucrative employment,—these, with the editing of newspapers, take up nearly the whole cultivated intellect of the country. Poets, painters, sculptors, scholars, those mere ministers to luxury, men to

The more we are engaged in the business of life, the more we are inclined to neglect the fine arts.

whom letters and the fine arts are a primary pursuit, where are they as a class? Individuals enough eminent in these pursuits may industriously be found, just to mark the more strongly the truth of the general proposition. They are not one of our classes of society. Wealth is not the American mammon, as has been charged upon us, more than it is the idol of all other commercial countries. It is the most general pursuit of civilized man. But it may be confessed without shame, that under our simple institutions there are fewer objects than in many countries to divide its natural sway. Its impulses and workings lie not more in the depths, but do they not lie more upon the surface of society? The machinery is bared to the eye; it has no more real power than if it were concealed by the most beautiful decorations of Grecian or Parisian art. But shall we not study that graceful concealment? To add beauty to strength, to adorn the useful, and give grace to power, these are what letters and the fine arts do for a commercial people. Without them society loses its refinement, and man becomes gross and unspiritual.

If the views which have been taken are not radically unsound, we stand in peril, in imminent peril, of this degradation. There are strong influences upon us adverse to refinement. The passing spirit of the age is by no means favorable to high literary cultivation; the fixed tendency of our political institutions seems to be altogether against it; and there is no natural buoyancy in our society capable by itself of resisting this accumulated pressure. What, then, is to be done? Shall we succumb? Shall we yield without an effort to the natural sway of things, and suffer ourselves to be borne, like straws upon the current, whithersoever it may tend? Why not? It is destiny, inevitable destiny. The times, interest, opinion, the insti-

tutions under which we are nurtured, the very atmosphere we breathe, compel us to our fate. What is there to arrest the downward course, if such it be? I answer, Education, — education! There is no other power under heaven, and this, rightly directed, is the power all-sufficient to wipe out the deep stigma, or avert the unutterable reproach, of being what we might otherwise one day become, first doubtless among the nations in the airy freedom of our institutions, first perhaps in magnitude, population, wealth, first probably in that ruder knowledge and practical ingenuity which regards only the physical comfort of man, and yet possibly last of the human race in social refinement and intellectual supremacy.

But it is not popular education (the cry of the times) which will do this. It is ~~not~~ a superficial diffusion of knowledge among the whole body of the people. What! discourage popular education? stop the diffusion of knowledge among the people, — the people of an unmixed republic? Madness indeed! No; — would to God that at this critical moment every freeman in America were, not only able to read and write his native tongue, as I trust all are, but so educated as to comprehend clearly the principles of the constitution under which he lives; to be sensitive of its inestimable value; to feel instinctively the first noiseless step of encroachment; to scent usurpation from afar; to distinguish the warnings of patriotism from the clamor of faction; and to know by the light of other days the true meaning of those insidious sounds on the lips of a popular favorite, — *Appellamus ad populum, appellamus ad populum!* Music for the many; to the alarmed and fearful patriot, who reads the page of history, a raven voice, croaking the downfall of liberty!

If equal intelligence could be distributed among men, not by levelling to the lowest, but by elevating all to the highest,—and such equality of intellect could be made commensurate and coextensive with civil rights,—then indeed might we realize the golden dream of a perfect commonwealth. But beware, beware in education above all things, of that common bane of democracy, the desire to equalize by levelling. All men cannot be educated alike. God and nature, the accidents and destinies of life, forbid it. Let not the standard of education, then, be wholly adapted, as I fear it is too much among us, to the middling demands and ability of men. You might almost as well adapt it to the lowest. For the principle tends downward, and still downward; and in the lowest deep a lower still appears. Would you say there shall be no instruction in our land which a pauper cannot purchase? It is a practical absurdity; and, since all cannot be educated alike, let some at least, in the name of patriotism, be carried to the highest point of cultivation of which the human soul is susceptible. Let there be light. Let it beam from the hill-tops, if we can bring ourselves to admit that there are any in a republic. Thence it must spread, irradiating the whole atmosphere of liberty; gilding the farm-house no less than the mansion of luxury; cheering and illuminating at his daily toil the humblest laborer who tills the soil of the valley. If this be unpopular, God save the Commonwealth!

I am concerned, not for the education of the people, at least here in New England; for our fathers gloriously provided for it, the energies of all classes are at this moment nobly directed towards it, and the people themselves loudly demand it. I am concerned rather for the education of those who are des-

timed to be the lights of the people ; for there is the weak spot. Without stopping now to inquire what the defect is, whether the insufficiency of our schools, the want of adequate endowments for our colleges, or whatever other cause, the fact is, that such an education as many enlightened parents desire for their children is not to be bought in America. Perhaps it will be said that it is to be bought nowhere. But I deny that the youths of America, with the most expensive education which their country affords, enter life upon a par with the best educated youths of Europe, in respect of literary attainment. Is not this true ? I appeal to you, judges of the fact, who have followed letters abroad and at home. Is this the necessary consequence of our republican institutions ? You will not admit it. Is it our poverty ? That plea would have answered fifty years ago. Has education, then, of the highest class advanced proportionately to our wealth and means and luxury of living ? I fear not. I greatly fear, that there is no other essential requisite of true national greatness in which we may now so justly shrink from proud comparison with the proudest nations of the earth, as this of accomplished education, — liberal, enlightened, thorough classical education.

The learning of the ancient languages especially is far too much neglected, in the present fashion of the times, for the class of whom I speak. What ! these neglected ? Are not our boys plodding through Greek and Latin from the time they can read English till they enter our universities ? Has not the standard of admission as to those studies been raised within twenty years ? Is not the course of reading there greatly extended ? Granted. I grant it all. And yet I fear the truth of an assertion which I have elsewhere heard, that at any time within these same twenty years, the head

boy at Eton or Westminster has been more accurately instructed in the niceties of these languages, and more thoroughly imbued with the spirit of classical learning, than any youth, — who has entered, shall I say ? no, for it would not truly represent the remark, — but who has graduated at either of our universities within the term. Does this sound ungraciously ? Perhaps it may. But is it not true ? — or at least a near approximation to the truth ? For I go for the truth in this grave matter ; the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If it be so, let us know it. I fear not what foreigners may say of us ; I fear more the fact and its consequences ; and if it be a fact, instead of smothering it in a corner from fear for our reputation, from fear for that reputation I would have it cried in the streets, proclaimed from the house-tops, till every American man and boy had become sensible of the fact, and alive to the deep shame which it involves. Deny it, defend it, or reform it.

But, dismissing foreign comparisons, have we in truth advanced in classical learning ? From what period ? Had not our Alma Mater, before the Revolution, scholars more accurate in the learned languages than she has had since ? At what time since would it have been easy to have drawn from her classical storehouse as many and as good specimens of Latin and Greek as are collected in the *Pietas et Gratulatio* of 1760 ? Are the young men of the present day as familiar with the classical authors of antiquity as are some of the best educated of those who were educated even soon after the Revolution ? Or is there among them that regard for the learning of the ancient languages, and that ardor for classical literature, which distinguished the more recent days of Buckminster, and Thacher, and others whom I could name ? No one pretends it. On the

contrary we are told, in extenuation of the fact, that great advancement has been made in other things, which is true ; that more of Greek and Latin reading is absolutely required at the University than formerly, which is also true ; and that the scheme of education in this particular is upon the whole fitted for the wants of the country, — against which I protest.

Some, who perhaps do fear what foreigners may say of us more than the fact, defend our national reputation on this score by questioning the utility of this extremely accurate study of ancient and dead languages. Others, infected with the revolutionary spirit of the times, are for abolishing these studies altogether, under the idea of substituting what they term useful and practical knowledge. Useful and practical knowledge ! What do they mean by it ? Is nothing useful to the world, or practical in life, of which all mankind cannot measure the utility, and which every man, woman, and child cannot practically use ? Will they have their sons taught to steer the plough, then, or hold the helm ? By no means. Yet nothing can be more useful ; nothing more practical. Honorable, highly honorable are these vocations too in their place ; and Heaven be thanked, that many a man in this community, who drove the plough in his youth along his father's corn-field, or hazarded his life as a poor cabin-boy upon the ocean, now stands honored and respected in the high places of society. Ay, you cannot look long, nor far, without seeing some one of these happy sons of freedom, whose name, it may be, is not unknown among the greatly scientific of the earth, or whose eloquence perhaps reaches the hearts of his countrymen in the farthest corners of the continent, and strikes across the Atlantic even on the ear of statesmen watchful of mankind. For, that which has been cast as a reproach upon

democracy, is it not in truth its highest glory? that "it is a boundless field of ambition, which excludes no individual from the utmost extravagance of hope." But do these self-taught and after-educated men, who by their own Herculean strength have struggled to the top, tell us that they owe their greatness to the misfortunes and defects of their early education? — that they owe it to this practical and useful knowledge of their youth? Is this their system? Do they send their sons to the same schools? Are they not rather distinguished among the patrons of liberal institutions and the arts, — zealous among the advocates of broad and deep foundations in science and literature?

But it will be said, that this violent translation of the terms useful and practical knowledge does not fairly represent the views of the dissenters from classical learning, who would propose the substitution of other liberal and intellectual acquisitions. Surely it does not. It jumps to the extreme. And there is doubtless room for fair argument upon a question which has been often argued, — unsuccessfully always for the reform. But I do not propose to go into that wide argument. Time would fail. The repetition would but enfeeble what others have enforced; and it would be mere supererogation; for, by the judgment and practice of mankind, the established course of education here and elsewhere, and the opinions probably of all whom I address (for I confine my remarks to the education of a class only of society), the point may be assumed as settled, and for the present not to be disturbed. These languages are to be studied to some extent. I rather choose, therefore, to meet those who question the advantage of an extremely accurate and extensive study of them. Not that every man needs to be a Porson or a Parr; nor is he likely to be by the mere course of a school and col-

lege education, however excellent and accurate it may have been ; at least we are not yet in a condition to make it needful to guard against dangers of that nature. Not that it is essential for the merchant, or the manufacturer, to be a deeply read scholar ; although he will make neither poorer voyages, nor worse broadcloths, for his learning ; certainly not for having learnt accurately in his youth that which was offered him to learn. But the fair question is of the purposes of the great bulk of those, who are the usual subjects of what is esteemed a complete liberal education. To which of them is it not advantageous, that the ancient languages should have been learnt accurately, if at all ?

Probably it will be conceded on all hands, that the chief object of primary education is not knowledge, but discipline, and facilities for acquiring knowledge. The absolute knowledge of things which the boy learns out of his school-books is next to nothing, — scarcely more in a course of years than the man of full-grown and well-trained faculties might acquire in as many months. The object then is rather to create habits of application ; to call into action that greatest principle of all human greatness, attention ; to give a command of the faculties, to such degree of investigation as their tender expansion will permit ; to enlarge and strengthen them by judicious exercise ; — and for this purpose language is selected, as being by God's own appointment more easily learnt in youth than in maturer years ; and a foreign language, because it is of necessity learnt in a more exact manner, and with greater intension of the mind, than our vernacular tongue. But surely accuracy in this learning is the whole evidence that the end for which it was learnt at all has been attained. The attention has been roused, — the faculties have been stretched ; and therefore the

knowledge of those things towards which the mind was directed is accurate. The more accurate, the stronger is this evidence.

And since the object is not so much knowledge, as the means of knowledge, the command of powers, and use of tools, the Greek and Latin languages are selected by common consent, not only for the immortal treasures they contain, but because they incorporate themselves into all the living languages of civilized man; so that he, who has once mastered these ancient vehicles of thought, descends, as from an eminence, how familiarly, compared with the mere vernacular scholar, into all or any of the dialects of modern Europe, and, which is of more importance, better understands his own. For we cannot read a single page, nor utter a solitary sentence, in our native language, (the very words I am compelled to use, the *single page*, the *solitary sentence*, the *native language*, speak to the fact,) without recurring to Rome, or Greece, or both, for most of the nice shades of thought which mingle and coalesce in the full meaning of every phrase that is uttered. Thence is it, that "even as a hawk fleeth not high with one wing, even so a man reacheth not unto excellency with one tongue." The ancient instructor of royalty whom I quote would have had for its fellow a learned tongue at least, doubtless little better than Heathen Greek. But are not the ends for which these languages are selected, in preference to all others, answered precisely in proportion to the accuracy with which they are learnt? And shall we, above all things, stop short of that point of accuracy which alone gives the power to perceive with clearness the beauties of the thought and the delicacies of expression they contain? Shall we learn a little of language, and stop short of its literature?

So far from doubting the advantage of the critical accuracy of Europe, and especially of England, in this branch of education, the more rational doubt is that of some of the sweeping reformers, whether there be any benefit, or at least a benefit proportioned to the time and labor consumed, in learning these languages so superficially and inaccurately as we for the most part do. For of what avail is it to talk of the simple majesty of Homer, or the deep pathos of Sophocles, to him who scarce reads with any tolerable fluency the mere character in which their works are written, and knows no more of the genius of their language than he does of the genius of the Cherokee? Yet of how many, who have received the advantages of what is termed a liberal education, is this literally true!

Accurate knowledge of the ancient languages useless! A waste of life to spend its best years on syllables and sounds, — mere names of things and those dead and forgotten! Rather let us say, that it is a waste of life to stop short of accuracy; — that language is thought, and the memory of words the memory of things. For God and nature have so mysteriously mingled body and soul, thought and expression, that man cannot set them asunder. They are one and indivisible. The principle of intellectual life hangs upon their union. We cannot think but in words. We cannot reason but in propositions. Or if the excited intellect should sometimes leap to an intuitive result and flash upon truth, it is yet a useless result, an unutterable, incommunicable, voiceless truth, — a waste flower in the wilderness, — a gem buried in the ocean, — until it has been embodied in language, and made visible by signs, or audible by sounds. And however it may be rarely true that the man of accurate thought is incapable, because he has not studied language, of

accurate expression, it is universally true that he who has greatly studied accuracy of expression, words, their arrangement, force, and harmony, in any language, dead or living, has also greatly attained towards accuracy of thought, as well as propriety and energy of speech. "For divers philosophers hold," says Shakespeare, clothing philosophy in the mantle of the Muse, "that the lip is parcel of the mind."

A waste of life! Why, what is man, his pursuits, his works, his monuments, that these niceties of language, the weight of words, and the value of sounds should be deemed unworthy of his immortal nature? He is fled like a shadow. The wealth which he toiled for is squandered by other hands. The lands which he cultivated are waste. That hearth-stone on which he garnered up the affections of his own home is sunk into the elements. The very marble, which his children raised over his ashes for a memorial unto eternity, is scattered to the winds of heaven. His sons, his kindred, his name, his race, his nation, all their mighty works, their magnificent monuments, their imperial cities, are vanished like a mist, and swept out of the memory of man. Yet the very word that he spoke, — that little winged word, — a breath, a vapor, gone as it was uttered, clothing a new and noble thought, embodying one spark of heaven's own fire, formed into letters, traced in hairy lines upon a leaf, enrolled, copied, printed, multiplied and multiplied, spreads over the whole earth; is heard among all tongues and nations; descends through all posterity; and lives for ever, immortal as his own soul. Homer and ye sacred prophets, attest this truth!

There is one view of this subject so peculiar for us, so national, so practical, that it conveys to my mind an irresistible feeling, that in this country, more than all

others, the learning of the ancient languages should be deeply cultivated. It is for its effect upon eloquence.

Never was there a great nation, since the extinction of the liberties of Rome, so peculiarly fitted for the developement of eloquence as these United States of America. We have been humorously called a logocracy. There may be ridicule in the term, but there is truth in the thought. We are indeed a nation of speechifiers. The pulpit speaks how copiously! The bar how interminably! Every public event of festivity, or condolence, is the occasion of meetings throughout the Union, and every meeting the occasion of a speech. Anniversary celebrations, like our own, are everywhere holden for the mere purpose of a speech. Whoever has any thing to propose for the action of others, begins it by calling a meeting and making a speech. The halls of Congress, the State legislatures, the primary meetings of the people, frequent elections, constant caucuses, State conventions, special conventions of particular interests and classes, town meetings, parish meetings, meetings of corporations innumerable and of private associations for all imaginable objects, are but so many theatres of speech; in which, daily and hourly, affairs more or less momentous are freely and fully debated, deliberated upon, voted upon, and so settled as it were by the power of the parts of speech. If this species of manufacture had required either encouragement or protection, those who are curious in such statistical arithmetic would doubtless have told us, and the world would have been astonished at the result, what millions of speeches are produced annually by these thirteen millions of people, and what in America is the daily average consumption of speech.

But if this too savour of ridicule, turn for a moment to the amazing effects which have thus been wrought

upon society. What lit up the flame of the American Revolution? What spread it like wildfire over thirteen unconnected colonies? What linked them together in the great bond of the Federal Constitution? What but the spirit-stirring eloquence of the leading patriots of those days? Yes, "I do say," (using the words of one of the most distinguished among them), "I do say, that the oration of James Otis against writs of assistance breathed into this nation the breath of life." This was the voice of New-England. Virginia proclaims her Patrick Henry as the great father of freedom. But wheresoever, or by whomsoever, the first spark was struck, not a county, not a village was there in America, but had its little senate deliberating upon wrongs and redress; and orators everywhere, eloquent in the reality of their cause and the magnitude of their stake, roused the people into action.

Look at wider effects which yet flow from the same cause in the amazing progress of civil and religious liberty throughout Christendom. All Europe struggles for freedom. Nation after nation sees light and draws breath. Even Portugal and Spain, which but now seemed sunk, hopelessly sunk, in the fathomless abyss of ignorance and superstition, are at length roused from their long lethargy, and move to their place among the constitutional nations of the earth. Did not the impulse proceed from the voice of American eloquence? Witness too the abolition of the slave-trade among all civilized nations. See the efforts everywhere making for the education of the people. Look at the astonishing reform of temperance in our own time and land. These, and a thousand other beneficial influences of less extent daily operating on society, are all effects of eloquence in the cause of truth; and mostly proceed from this habit of assembly, debate, and harangue,

which prevails in England far more than in any other nation of Europe, and in the United States of America more than in all the world beside.

But this is not all. Eloquence, written and spoken, has been, is, and is to be, the great engine of this government. For what is the essence of our government? Opinion. The government was built upon opinion. In this it lives, and by this it must stand or fall. Yes, public opinion is the whole bond that binds together these thirteen millions of people. The Constitution is the great and venerable name under which it rallies. God preserve it! But let public opinion be, that this union ought to be dissolved, and it is dissolved,—*eo ictu*. It is fire to the flax. Your government cannot stand a day against it. Not an institution in the country can live an hour without it. Our property, our lives, our liberties, all depend upon opinion. The laws and their ministers! These indeed are our temporary safeguards. But what are they? Mere instruments of the people. The people made them; and in the majesty of their might the people can unmake them, *per fas aut nefas*, whenever public opinion shall justify or demand it. And by what is public opinion regulated and controlled? By the voice and the press;—reason, argument, persuasion; and these are eloquence.

Is it not then astonishing, when we see what miracles are daily wrought by the power of words, when we reflect that our whole government is based on public opinion, and that public opinion is wholly formed and directed by speech and the press, and consider how the whole habit of our society conforms to this necessary influence of republican institutions, and that writing and speaking are the daily business of the nation,—is it not truly astonishing, that eloquence is not a study

among us, and that liberal education is not mainly directed to that end? Is it so? Trace, for example's sake, the best education of a modern American lawyer from its beginning to his entrance upon professional practice. The boy goes to his first school, and what does he learn there? To read? Not at all. He learns indeed the forms of letters, the manner in which they are combined into syllables and words, and the general meaning of the visible signs which he sees on a printed page. But does he learn the true sounds of those signs? Does he commonly acquire distinct articulation, accurate pronunciation, or just emphasis? Does he get an ear for harmony, or any sense of tone and modulation? Answer it, ye parents. No, none of these things does he learn there. He learns to read as it were for the eye, but not so to read as to convey to the ear of another any clear and distinct significancy of sound. But he has learned to read, and is sent to a more advanced school. For what? To be fitted for college, as it is termed; which seems to be regarded as the whole end of school education, and is commonly interpreted to mean the being taught just so little as will barely suffice for a brief examination in the least demands of the University. Without having learnt to read, he may perhaps have declaimed; but how often with the effect only of making bad habits worse, and acquiring new ones no better. He may have had some exercise in writing, perhaps; but has he practically acquired any knowledge of the accurate structure of a period, any notion of harmony and effect in composition? He has learnt something, of course, but little enough, of the ancient languages; has he the dimmest perception of the beauties they contain? Has he been led to read even in his own language with any regard to style of composition? So far from it, at

the University in most cases (there are of course exceptions to be found in our schools) he feels for the first time that speaking is a thing at all worthy of attention, and learns that the expression of his thoughts with accuracy and elegance in written composition is an art of considerable importance as well as some difficulty. At the University, recently, attention is paid to these departments of instruction; the youth makes progress in them, and makes farther progress in the ancient languages; but during the same period his mind must be principally occupied in other departments of learning more proper for an University; yet, out of such half-formed materials, our diligent Alma Mater is expected to produce to the world, in four short years, men accomplished in Greek and Roman Literature, acquainted with modern languages, learned in all the sciences, able writers, and effective speakers. Even there extemporaneous composition and delivery are not subjects either of instruction or practice; and writing is an exercise of far too rare occurrence to create that facility as well as accuracy of composition, which are indispensable to the formation of a good speaker. On quitting the University the graduate goes to the study of his profession. During that period of life his attention is devoted exclusively to the acquisition of its elementary learning, and the forms of business. He receives no instruction, and commonly has no practice, either in writing, extemporizing, or declaiming. With such preparation he enters upon the practical duties of a forensic orator, and without any previously formed habit which enables him to compose accurately and rapidly, or to utter what he does compose with effect, all that he ever learns of these essentials he learns in the course of practice by the actual arguing of

causes ; — and in them, having enough to do with the study of the cause, the preparation of evidence and the investigation of law, he attends only to a certain methodical arrangement of his brief, and bestows no special care on style of composition or manner of delivery. Indeed, manner cannot well be the subject of study while matter presses ; and an artificial manner assumed for the particular occasion would be sure to be ill put on, and betray itself so far as to be worse than mere negligence. Yet surely the practice of speaking without either general or particular preparation in style of composition and manner of delivery, so common, I had almost said universal, cannot but lead to bad habits rather than good ones, and respectable mediocrity becomes at length the highest standard of excellence.

Thus the whole art of oratory may be said to be utterly neglected among us, as a thing unworthy of manly pursuit ; and eloquence, when it exists, to be regarded as a mere gift from heaven, instead of being, as it mainly is, a splendid acquisition ; — a gift if you will, but a cultivated gift. For, not to enter upon an old metaphysical discussion, where the whole matter of dispute lies, as usual, in the definition of a ~~term~~, it may be admitted that such thrilling and electrifying sublimity of eloquence as intensely moves the passions of men, and fills us with mingled admiration and awe, is the result in the first place of extraordinary gifts ; but on the other hand it may be safely insisted, that to enable the orator to use extraordinary powers, as well as that degree of power which is given to most men, with extraordinary effect, there must have been long and severe training of the mind and study of his art.

A Patrick Henry may occasionally burst upon the world, seeming to be an orator by mere inspiration ;—but if the secret of his soul could be unfolded, and the workings of his mind from infancy could be laid before you visible to the eye, think you not there would be seen traces of severe discipline and deep study, — a habit of intense action in secret composition, — and probably some early course of reading, or intellectual conversation with gifted men, which had stored his memory with materials to work upon, and given him command of language? All that can be said of such prodigies is, that their mode of study and self-education has been peculiar, and that the magnitude of their natural gifts has enabled them, by great internal efforts, to use small acquisitions and small means for self-formation more effectually, than other men commonly use great acquisitions and great means. Or, if no other solution of the problem will satisfy the mind, let us admit that such beings, like children whose precocious powers, equalling or even exceeding those of the most cultivated and accomplished minds, have sometimes astonished mankind, are mere miracles, deviations from the ordinary course of God's providence. But systems of education are made for men, not monsters. And, upon a system of education adapted to that end, can it be reasonably doubted that all men, that is, all men of intelligence, and free from natural impediments, might acquire the faculty of composing and speaking with that degree of ease, perspicuity, and force, which we commonly call eloquence? that most men might go far towards eloquence of the more moving kind ; while a few gifted, — gifted with the sensibility of the poet, as well as the penetration of the philosopher, —

might reach that harrowing eloquence which speaks to the soul ?

Does this seem visionary ? Yet the fact is undeniable, that those moderns who have reached the loftiest height of eloquence (unless Patrick Henry, of whose system of self-education we know nothing but by vague tradition, be an exception,) have studied it profoundly ; and that the great orators of antiquity, who live immortal in their works, as well as in traditionary fame, and whom no modern has yet equalled in the general estimation of mankind, were educated to this art from their infancy, and made it the business of their lives ; while we have many who make speaking their business, indeed, but few who make it their study, none who are educated for it as a primary end. And what are the purposes of a vast majority of those who leave our universities ? Whither are they destined ? To the bar, the bench, the pulpit, the professorships of your colleges, the high places of instruction throughout the land ; to become pleaders, preachers, teachers, authors, legislators, statesmen, public orators ; in all ways to guide, enlighten, and instruct the public mind. In a word, their essential object is to write well and to speak well ; or, in another word, eloquence ; power of composition and expression. For, however excellence in speaking and excellence in writing may otherwise differ, the same education, mainly, is adapted for both. At least, the education of the orator includes that of the accomplished writer, superadding somewhat not undesirable for all educated men.

Do any doubt whether the attainment of this great eloquence among us be desirable, and whether it be not capable of doing evil as well as good ? Do you ask if it were not better that man should be wholly influenced by calm reason, speaking in the plainest

language? I answer that man is not such a creature. He is not so constituted as to be governed by reason alone in its purest and most abstract form. He is endowed with sentiments, propensities, impulses, and passions, which are his sources of action. They can never be obliterated from the human constitution;—they must, therefore, be guided, governed, and used. It is the business of the orator to use them; but consistently with reason, and according to her dictates. If he step beyond that line, he violates his sacred trust. Do you say that this power is capable of great abuse? I accept it as proof of a great good. Every faculty and acquisition of man is liable to abuse; the more so in proportion to its excellence. Why say that eloquence won the cause that should have been lost, rather than that the want of eloquence lost the cause which should have been won? Are not these things all relative? Can there be absolute equality of human powers? To use an old illustration, Calvus was the orator of Rome until Hortensius came, and Hortensius was esteemed eloquence itself until Cicero spoke;—but is it not plain that Cicero was no more likely to have won the cause which should not have been won against Hortensius, than Hortensius was against Calvus, or he against some humbler orator of Rome, had no Cicero or Hortensius ever lived? Since, then, this liability to occasional misuse and accidental evil belongs not to the degree of eloquence, but rather to the faculty of speech, or reason itself, since it is but a part of the necessary imperfection of human affairs, our true principle of action should be to raise the common standard. Raise it to its utmost height. Let the power be cultivated. Let us have Cicero and Demosthenes among us, if we may. The eloquence of the whole country will improve by their example. Give

us, if it be possible, yet greater than these ; the nation will be still advanced by their efforts both morally and intellectually.

Are we not accustomed, in the pride of intellect, to despise too much what are sometimes contemptuously termed the arts of oratory ? What after all is it which marks the difference between a dull speaker to whom, though intelligent, none listen, and an interesting speaker to whom, though not more intelligent, all listen with profit and delight, but style of composition ? What between the speaker of common interest, and the speaker of thrilling interest, but style of delivery added to style of composition ? Chesterfield, though somewhat finical in his notions of deportment in common life, was yet an acute observer of mankind and an excellent judge of the subject on which he writes, when he says without qualification, that success as a speaker turns more upon manner than matter. "Pitt and Murray," he tells us, meaning Lord Chatham and Lord Mansfield, "were beyond comparison the best speakers of the House of Commons, because they were the best orators. They alone had the art to quiet or inflame the House. Not that their matter was better, or their arguments stronger, than those of other speakers. But the House expects pleasure from them and therefore listens ; finds it and therefore approves."

It is sometimes said, and has been said by profound thinkers and able writers too, that the arts of oratory do but serve to create distrust. But is it any other than bad oratory which produces this effect ? Is it not excess ? "*Ars est celare artem ;*"—and every man of common judgment soon learns how to measure his own strength, and dares not reach beyond his ability. The error with us is altogether on the other side.

But, if education were mainly directed to this end, would there not be improvement? Should we have so many pious and sensible discourses from the pulpit coldly read in such an insensible, unintelligible, and absolutely insufferable manner, as we now often do? Should we hear so many learned arguments at the bar wanting the first element of logic, a distinct proposition in them, from beginning to end, — a series of broken sentences begun and never ended, marking each rule of grammar only by its violation? And who beforehand shall presume to set the farthest limit to improvement? If education were so directed, what adequate reason can be assigned why the eloquence of this country might not rival that of Greece and Rome? Whence this admitted inferiority of modern eloquence? For the moderns are prompt enough to assume to themselves all that is their due. Yet, while they claim to compete with the ancients successfully in every other species of composition, to surpass them in some, here the general consent of mankind yields to these the palm.

Hume doubts, not of the fact, but of its causes, and upon the whole confesses himself unsatisfied with every reason that had been assigned; nor do I know that any writer since his day has given a more satisfactory solution of this problem. But, looking at the history of Europe since the revival of letters, do we not see sufficient cause, unless England during a short period of her history be an exception, in arbitrary governments? No slave, says Longinus, ever was an orator. A more modern writer thus amplifies the remark: "Poetry, and other parts of literature which are only proper for amusement, may possibly flourish under the smiles of an arbitrary prince; but force and solidity of reasoning, or a sublime and commanding eloquence

are inconsistent with slavish restraint or timorous dependency." The thought is profound. All history corroborates its truth. Great eloquence has coëxisted only with great popular freedom. The eloquence of Greece and Rome expired with the fall of liberty. Freedom of speech must of necessity precede eloquence. But beyond that there must be motive ; it must have power ; it must see results from its own efficacy. And notwithstanding the great and glorious liberty of the land of our fathers, it may well be doubted whether even there the overpowering influence of the crown and the aristocracy, habitually controlling popular representation, and binding always a majority of the Commons, has not tended, more than has been allowed for, to repress the cultivation of oratory, by lessening competition in that art, and thus preventing its developement to that amplitude of glory which otherwise it might have reached.

If this cause have operated there, it cannot operate here. Executive influence may indeed exercise a partial control over some particular body of representatives, shutting their ears, hearts, and understandings, against the most convincing arguments of human reason, and the most affecting appeals of human eloquence. But these reach beyond those to whom they are primarily addressed. The press gives them, if with diminished efficacy, still effective, to the people. The great corrective of free popular elections instantly succeeds. And if the people have but half the virtue, or a tythe of the intelligence, which we are apt to ascribe to them, the thunders of the Senate Chamber cannot roll in vain over an agitated land. There is nothing surely in the nature of our government to restrain the wing of eloquence from her widest or her loftiest flight. And such is the

effect of popular institutions on this species of composition, that notwithstanding defective education, and a general neglect of the oratorical art, impartial critics, searching for the best specimens of deliberative eloquence which the present day affords, would probably make their selection from the debates of our national legislature. What is there, since the death of Canning, in the parliamentary eloquence of Great Britain, which can be fairly said to surpass, if it equal, that which we sometimes hear from our own Congress ?

Yet it is said that the Anglo-Saxon blood wants the mercurial temperament of Rome and Greece, and that the people of America, and especially of New England, are too phlegmatic and cold to be affected by oratory, however excellent. Little, as it seems to me, do they know of the true character of this people, who so think and write. Individually they may be marked, like their ancestors, by a certain exterior coldness of manner ; but collectively no people are subject to stronger or stranger excitements. The admiration of no people is more moved at that which is truly and greatly admirable. Look, for example, at the effect of theatrical action upon them. What people are colder, you will ask, to the actor of mere secondary merit ? — but, give them that superior acting which plays with the great passions of the human heart, and what people are roused to a more extraordinary pitch of enthusiasm ? But why resort to the stage ? Look to the thing itself. Watch the breathless multitude when, on some rare occasion, it listens to the voice of genuine and lofty eloquence. See them, hear them, when the man of power, having gradually swelled with his theme into some grand career of elevated sentiment, suddenly bursts forth into those bold

figures and that vivid language which excited nature equally prompts and demands, and say whether these men are not capable of being agitated by a breath.

Still others insist that the New-Englanders are too cautious and acute, and have too much practical good sense, to be really moved and acted upon by mere eloquence. The same remark has been made of the English; and Hume, in touching on this topic, inquires, with characteristic slyness, whether audiences as they rise in England can be supposed to have more good sense than Julius Cæsar. It is a pregnant question. For Cicero had power in two several instances to move this great and resolute man from the settled purpose of his soul. Hume alludes to one of them, and it deserves consideration. The orator addressed not a Roman mob, not the conscript fathers, but Cæsar alone; the intellectual, accomplished, and practical Cæsar; himself an orator, who spoke, says Quintilian, with the same force with which he fought; whom Cicero counts among the greatest of the orators of Rome; and who knew, as well as Cicero himself, all those artifices, as they are often termed, by which the unwary might be entrapped, and in which some would represent the whole art of oratory to consist. Him Cicero addressed, in the plenitude of his power and the pride of recent victory, supreme dictator, and despot of the state. Cicero, the adherent and intimate of Pompey, with whose overthrow and slaughter Cæsar was yet flushed, addressed this man, under these circumstances, upon that which he had premeditated and resolved. Yet Cæsar trembled with emotion, and Cicero prevailed. And how was this effected? Not by turgid declamation, which would have been misplaced; — not by startling and terrific appeals, which would

have passed by him, like the idle wind ; not by attempts at high-wrought pathos, against which his auditor was steeled ; — but by a winning appeal to that magnanimity and clemency which were his pride ; a flattering address to that noble policy of making friends of enemies which he had given out and acted upon as his policy, and by a chaste, respectful allusion to his vanquished enemy and that fallen cause in which Cicero and his client equally partook, but which Cæsar could no longer fear. Such topics skilfully and delicately pressed, in choice and eloquent, but not exaggerated language, left the conqueror of the world ashamed of the petty revenge which he had meditated, elated with the consciousness of his own superior generosity of soul, and confirmed in the larger expediency of his own merciful policy.

But why, asks the modern reader of this beautiful composition, did Cæsar tremble ? since we see neither an adequate cause for great emotion, nor any apparent attempt to excite it. It was by reason of that which writing cannot convey, the inexpressible magic of tone and look ; for the orator could not have alluded to his slaughtered friend and that fallen cause, even in the calm and temperate language which he studied to assume, but in a subdued and broken voice, and with that tearful aspect, which betrayed the deep and real emotion he seemed laboring to conceal. He was himself moved, and that moved Cæsar. And are not these sensible moderns, even of New England, liable to be swayed by such influences ?

The effects of Christianity, softening and refining the passions of the human heart, making us more temperate beings and less subject to wild emotions, have been thought by some unfavorable to great eloquence.

And it is true that the modern orator dares not appeal to the savage principle of revenge ; nor is he justified in exciting hatred of individuals. But what limit has he in stirring up hatred of vice, indignation against injustice, oppression, fraud, corruption ? May he not lawfully appeal to every sentiment of patriotism, magnanimity, and elevation of purpose ? May he not press those magic springs which move the softer affections of the human heart ? And were you to strike out from the works of the ancient orators all that is infected by the barbarism of their age, although this would materially mar performances adapted to that age, would not enough remain to demonstrate that no part of this was essential to their eloquence ?

As well might it be said that the spirit of Christianity has impaired the beauty and depressed the sublimity of poetic composition. Yet does not Milton soar upon as bold a wing, and Shakspeare touch a chord of as genuine pathos, as any poet of antiquity ? So far is the influence of Christianity from having been adverse to eloquence, that it claims for its offspring many of the most eloquent effusions of the modern world. It opens a whole field of oratory new and peculiar to itself. The religion at least of the moderns may boast of a power in eloquence, neither heard nor imagined in the silent temples of antiquity. The pursuits of clerical men being wholly literary, the most eminent among them have attained to great nicety in that written eloquence which they have been led to cultivate. But what improvement should we not witness, if to the charm of the composition were oftener added the manner of the orator chastened to his cause ? And still greater improvement would result, I am firmly persuaded, if, not lessening, but doubling or quadrupling, the great labor now bestowed on written

discourses, those, and they are not few, who have the gift, should acquire the art also, of extemporaneous composition and delivery. What noble opportunities have they of moving the affections, as well as leading the judgment, in the cause of infinite truth! For religion is of the heart surely, not of the mere reason. It is a feeling, not an abstraction; an innate propensity, sentiment, affection of the human soul; capable of being deeply stirred and warmed and dilated by the voice of eloquence. The pure intellect, the philosophy of religion, let it lucubrate in the closet, or meditate in the expanse of nature. Through the pen let us learn from its lucubrations, what learning and logic can teach (alas! what can they teach?) of the mysterious and metaphysical nature of God and of man. But from the living pulpit let us learn how to act and feel, rather than what to think of things unfathomable. Let us not hear of those scholastic theories and controversial dogmas which have ever distracted and disgraced the Christian church, at times deluging the world with blood and crime, and still engendering in Christian hearts "envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness." Thence the cold skepticism of Hume. Thence the treacherous sneer of Gibbon. Thence mainly that open infidelity which now boldly lifts its blaspheming voice in the very heart of our own New England.

But we are constantly told that in these days there is no room for eloquence; that it can never again be the same divine thing it was of old; that the advanced knowledge and civilization of the world, the improved sobriety of modern manners, the greater complexity and accuracy of the laws, and the nicer quality of modern legislative and judicial institutions, place men above those influences which affected either an Athe-

nian mob or a Roman Senate; and that the studied eloquence of antiquity, speaking in language wrought with consummate art and polished *ad unguem*, yet exalted, and sometimes passionate, would be wholly unsuited to the practical affairs of modern life, and quite incapable of moving an American audience. May not such remarks proceed partly from a misapprehension of the true character of ancient eloquence, and partly from an overweening conceit of our own intellectual superiority? Can such causes be justly said to be hostile to the cultivation and attainment of a degree of eloquence equal to that of antiquity, or do they only somewhat modify the quality and form of its address?

The influence of the press, paradoxical as it may at first seem, will be thought perhaps, on reflection, more adverse than that of any other modern institution to the cultivation of oratorical, as distinguished from written, eloquence; because speeches designed for extensive effect are read by more persons than hear them; and the after report is a truly republican equalizer among men. The composition of the master is not only robbed of half its charm by the loss of voice and action, but the very thoughts are frozen and enfeebled as the pen gives to the cold sheet what the tongue, in the excitement of the hour, had vividly impressed on living souls; while the composition of the most ordinary and intolerable speaker may acquire in the elaboration of the closet an order, precision, accuracy, beauty, force, which his tongue never told, nor the heart of his auditor ever conceived to be his. This takes something from the ultimate, nothing from the immediate effect of oratory, and in most cases those to whom it is addressed act under the immediate impression. That there is a press everywhere speak-

ing "with most miraculous organ" may be a reason, therefore, why oratory should be cultivated by fewer persons ; but it is no adequate cause why the great numbers who do practise speaking as a business should not cultivate its power, nor why, if cultivated, it should not produce at the time its ancient and legitimate effects.

There may be something, too, in the other causes which are suggested as operating unfavorably on the oratorical art, especially in their bearing on forensic eloquence ; — yet even here the probable effects from such causes seem to be commonly much over-rated. The accuracy of modern legal proceedings, the simplicity and narrowness of the questions presented for consideration by what is termed the issue between the parties, the extreme technicality of the law as a science, and the vast accumulation of statutes and reports, making it the labor of years to become but moderately learned in the law, added to the hurry of trials and the want of opportunity for great premeditation, are circumstances which doubtless have their weight, and which are thought by some necessarily to preclude the attainment, or forbid the exercise at a modern bar, of the highest kind of oratorical talents. Must we admit then that even Cicero and Demosthenes, placed in a Massachusetts courtroom, instructed for their case in the necessary knowledge of the law and of our language and of the manners and sentiments of the age, would fail to produce any extraordinary effect, and speedily sink to the level of the respectable advocates who abound there ? I must confess that I cannot bring myself to this opinion. It is true that the judicial courts, both of Athens and of Rome, were composed of a numerous body taken from the people at large. They judged equally

of the law and the fact ; and an appeal lay in most cases, if not in all, to the collective body of the people. Hence, doubtless, loose considerations of natural equity were as likely to govern their judgments as the letter of the law. The better feelings and the fiercer passions of our nature were in a great degree open to address ; and the pleader of causes, it would seem, might freely range over every topic likely to influence the decision of a popular assembly. Contrasted with this, they who apologize for the inferiority of modern eloquence call upon us to look at the venerable constitution of a modern court. There sit a grave and learned few, selected, from a class dedicated to the law, for their superior wisdom, erudition, and virtue. Their lives are spent in profound investigation, accurate analysis, and logical deduction. Their office is simply to pronounce the law upon the precise question before them, and they sit in judgment, bound by their oaths and their characters, to the strict discharge of this duty, under the critical, and perhaps captious scrutiny of a learned bar. What have such men to do with motives of generosity and expediency ? What ability have they, if they had the will, to exercise a large discretion, or to obey the impulse of feeling ? Would Cicero or Demosthenes, it may be asked, in the argument of a technical demurrer before such a tribunal, have ventured into the regions of poetical oratory ? Surely not, for the first rule of eloquence is propriety ; and the first requisite of an orator, good sense. "*Scribendi*" (and but for prosody *loquendi*) "*rectè sapere est et principium et fons.*"

But it is by no means uncommon for cases to arise in the course of modern judicial proceedings, presenting to the Court for legal adjudication questions of national rights, state policy, the powers of

government, and of particular departments of the government, subjects of international and constitutional law, far more frequent in this country than in any other, which often not only fairly open, but imperatively demand, the discussion of the broadest principles of general justice and expediency, and in which it is difficult to say what limit is fixed by the nature, either of the question or of the tribunal, to the widest range of genuine argumentative eloquence. The Cherokee cause, for example, was of this description. Nullification, had it lived long enough, might have presented such another to the judicial tribunals, before which it must, from its nature, have been discussed with the same amplitude of eloquence as it was in the Senate Chamber. Every lawyer in the course of his practice has heard argued at the bar, even under the form of some precise and narrow issue in law, topics similar to these, if not equal in the extent and magnitude of the inquiries involved. The character of the tribunal addressed, granting it to exceed immeasurably that even of the Athenian Areopagus in learning and dignity, can set no other limit to the range of eloquence than that which justly belongs to the propriety of the cause. And when we turn from the Bench to those extraordinary and deeply interesting questions of fact, which often present themselves in important causes for the consideration of a jury, and reflect that a jury is, after all, nothing more than a small popular assembly, not differing widely either in its constitution or power, at least over criminal causes, from the *judices* of antiquity, and call to mind how often their interests, prejudices, passions, and feelings are in fact appealed to, with more or less of art and effect, it seems impossible to escape the conclusion, that modern forensic oratory has after all a wide scope

for eloquence, and that modern inferiority in that respect, if it exist, must be mainly attributable to other causes.

The eloquence designed to produce great impression upon a modern assembly of any kind, at least in New England, must undoubtedly be of somewhat sterner stuff, than that which might have been sufficient to move the flighty inhabitants of Italy or the fickle multitude of Athens. But, after all, the distinction seems to lie rather in the greater difficulty of satisfying the reason, than the greater difficulty of moving the affections, of a modern auditory. The reason must first be satisfied. This was the precept and the practice of antiquity ; but with us the reason is a faculty more cultivated, more critical, more captious than it was in Athens or in Rome. Greater refinement of argument is required, therefore, to reach this point ; but, that being done, the heart is as liable to be moved now, as it was two thousand years ago, by those powers and sympathies which God has created purposely to move it. Greater art, greater skill, not more native power, is requisite to produce the same effects. A modern audience demands better eloquence. Is that a reason why that which they have should be really inferior ? or why eloquence as an art should be less cultivated than it was ?

In estimating the inaptitude of the ancient oratorical style for modern forensic purposes, is not the case commonly overstated, by tacitly comparing in our minds occasions absolutely dissimilar, and then inquiring whether the eloquence which was admirably adapted for the one would be at all suited for the other ? Do we not turn our thoughts on the one hand to common business of daily occurrence in our courts, and on the other to orations delivered in

causes of a peculiar and public character? Ancient arguments in private causes, of small moment except to the parties, are either not preserved, or little read, and not at all referred to in our general estimate of ancient oratory. We are apt to look upon the extant orations of Cicero, for example, as if they had constituted the great bulk of his oratorical composition, or were at least fair specimens of his usual style of forensic argument, without reflecting that these were the remarkable few which he judged worthy of publication, because of their extraordinary character, the general interest of the causes to which they relate, the unusual field which they afforded for the higher kind of eloquence, or other reasons which had given them peculiar celebrity. But looking upon them in this latter light, is it fair to ask, whether a style so elevated and oratorical would be suitable for the common practice of a modern bar? The whole number of these orations but little exceeds fifty, and far the greater part were speeches to the Senate, or harangues to the people, or other addresses not of a forensic character. Yet for thirty-five years Cicero was in almost uninterrupted practice at the bar, arguing causes daily. "There scarcely passes a day," says he in one of his private letters, "in which I do not defend some;" — and there is notice of his being engaged in more than one trial on the same day. It is quite certain, therefore, that his forensic arguments must have been many hundreds, probably some thousands, in number. Yet of these we have scarce twenty; — and in what kind of causes? Proceedings of the nature of a modern impeachment were of great frequency both at Athens and at Rome; causes for the most part capital, and in which the whole life and administration of some servant of the republic were

judicially arraigned. The most of these forensic orations of Cicero will be found to have been spoken in cases of this description ; and of the residue nearly all were in causes, which, for various reasons, assumed a political complexion. Instead of comparing these compositions, therefore, with such arguments as seem to us most suitable for matters of daily occurrence, we should rather compare them with the orations, as they may well be termed, of Sheridan and Burke on the trial of Warren Hastings ; and we shall soon begin to suspect that there is less difference than we were wont to imagine in the latitude of ancient and modern oratory.

Two or three only of the orations of Cicero are preserved, which belong strictly to the class of private and civil suits ; and these I imagine will be found in like manner upon careful examination to depart less widely, than we might at first expect, from the style of argument appropriate to similar causes before a modern jury ;—except indeed the oration for Archias the poet, so commonly, and so unfairly, selected as a signal proof of the unfitness of ancient eloquence for the real business of life. This was a peculiar and distinguished composition, which probably as soon as it was pronounced became the subject of general remark and of eager curiosity among the literati of Rome, and which Cicero, therefore, gave again to the public in its present form. It is true that the whole question was whether Archias was a Roman citizen ; and that after saying in few words all that was proper to be said upon a very simple state of law and facts, the orator, having a poet for his client, takes advantage of that circumstance to launch forth into a splendid panegyric upon poetry and liberal pursuits. This occupies the greater part of his discourse, and yet is

no otherwise connected with the cause than by the far-fetched and flimsy argument, that all who were eminent in such glorious arts, ought, therefore, to be taken for citizens of Rome. A strange course indeed for learned counsel in modern times upon a question of naturalization ! But when cited as a specimen of the ancient mode of arguing a plain matter of fact, why is it not noted, as in common justice to antiquity it should be, that the eloquent advocate both introduces and closes this beautiful piece of mere oratory with the most formal apologies for departing from his usual forensic style. So far from even tacitly permitting this to pass for a fair example of ancient argumentative eloquence, the author himself expressly declares it to be entirely inconsistent with the practice of the bar, and, instead of claiming to be so heard as matter of common right or of established usage, he diffidently introduces these remarks to the mere favor and indulgence of the judges ; while the judges, or jurors, as we should rather say from the nature of their office, being, as it happened, men of letters and not men of law, could sit contentedly and hear Cicero expatiate for some ten or fifteen minutes on such a theme, notwithstanding a fair warning *in limine*, that what he proposed to say had nothing to do with the cause. The truth is, that Cicero seems to have been placed in a posture which sometimes occurs to the modern advocate. His client expected a speech, but his cause gave him nothing to say ; and, what was of more importance, and far rarer in modern practice, the judges concurred with the client. Perhaps modern judges, however, might be less inexorable if they should hear such eloquence.

The trial of Milo, likewise often referred to in various regards, was, in truth, a political cause vehemently

agitating the great parties of Rome, though the charge, reduced to modern form, was nothing more than an indictment for murder. The answer was such as often arises, namely, that the deceased was the aggressor, and the killing a necessary act of self-defence. Hence, notwithstanding the political complexion of the cause, and the peculiar circumstances of this trial, conducted before a tribunal created by a special act of legislation, and under the eye of Pompey himself who attended in person surrounded by his troops, it is, nevertheless, from its intrinsic character, a fairer subject of comparison with modern causes, than most of those in which an argument has been preserved. Can any lawyer read this admirable performance and deny that much of it would answer for a modern jury? might we not say all of it, except so far as a degree of unsuitableness results, not from the style of composition, or the magnificence of the oratory, but from the manners and morals of the age, and the peculiar circumstances which have been alluded to as belonging to this trial? The whole argument, for example, tending to establish the fact, that the rencounter was accidental on the part of Milo, but designed on the part of Clodius, and that the latter, though slain, was yet the real assassin, is such close and logical argument upon circumstantial evidence, drawn chiefly from the conduct of the respective parties, as could not fail to recommend itself most powerfully to modern jurors and judges; nor is there any thing in what may be termed the eloquence of the argument, which can be fairly said to be unsuitable for a great capital cause, especially for one with which political considerations necessarily, though perhaps improperly, mingled.

When, on the other hand, the orator descants largely and forcibly on the flagitious character of

Clodius, contrasting it with that of his client, not for the purpose merely of sustaining the probability of his main position, that the former was the aggressor, but with the farther view of showing that Milo, had he so intended, would have been justified in killing Clodius as a common enemy of the republic, he uses an argument, which was doubtless forcible to a Roman, but which would be shocking to a modern jury, even if it were admissible in our course of judicial practice. Yet the argument was a fair one as it was used, being designed to turn the edge of a dangerous suggestion from the prosecuting party, that the tenor of the special decree, under which this trial was had, not only had prejudged the cause and, in effect, had declared the killing of Clodius to have been unjustifiable, but even went so much farther as to make this particular homicide a treason against the state, and thus left nothing for the judges to inquire of but the bare fact of the killing and by whom, which Milo had not from the beginning denied. I am inclined to think, therefore, that the argument for Milo, and others of the same class, would be ill adapted for a modern forum, not so much from the style of composition, as because the sentiments, laws, and manners of that age and people sometimes led to a different range of argument and of illustration from that which would now be effective or proper.

The same remarks, I imagine, might be applied to the orations of Demosthenes. Nearly all of these are popular harangues on political topics. The oration on the Crown was indeed forensic in form, but in a cause tried by the whole people, and one which, in its nature, was analogous only to a modern impeachment, fairly and necessarily involving the whole political history of

Athens under the administration of the orator himself. But if we look at the orations of Isæus, the preceptor of Demosthenes, translated by Sir William Jones with legal exactness doubtless as well as literary grace, we shall find these, which related to private causes of inheritance, as simple and logical in their structure as modern arguments, although the reasoning may be less minute and refined. And, in general, it seems to me, though I speak with great diffidence on such a subject, that we shall more often find, in the ancient orators, arguments adduced, which in their substantial character would be unsuitable for a modern audience, than a style of composition too elevated and too oratorical for the occasion, according to our standard of taste. Not that these ancient works, designed for a different age, are to be exactly followed as precise models of style for modern imitation. But the point which I mean to enforce is, that, as at one time these venerable antiques were erroneously and indiscriminately set up for literal models, so now, in the altered fashion of the times, the unsuitableness of their oratorical style for modern eloquence, even of the forensic cast, is altogether overrated ; — and that modern forensic eloquence is really capable of great and substantial improvement by the study of these mighty masters of their art. If such an opinion seem to require the sanction of a name, we may cite for its support a legal authority no less than Lord Mansfield, with whom it was not mere speculative opinion, but matter of practice.

Yet we hear ancient eloquence sometimes spoken of, as if it were a species of rhapsody instead of argument, composed of apostrophes to the Alban hills and groves, and appeals to the shades of those generous souls who died at Marathon. Surely this is wide from

the fact; for the "*O Diï immortales*" of Cicero will be found to occur little oftener after all, than the "Good God, Mr. Speaker," of modern oratory; and the language of Demosthenes certainly, if not of Cicero, is far less ornate and violently figurative, than that of the modern compositions with which it may be most aptly compared. It is not that the modern orator dares not and does not, on occasions of great excitement, use as bold an oratorical license as Greece or Rome ever witnessed; but that his bold figures and lofty flights are commonly in worse taste and more feebly sustained. He has not prepared his audience with so much art by the general strain of his eloquence, and by a gradual elevation of their feelings to a point which wakes and fires the imagination. Nor does he give full effect to his oratory by that admirable action, not gesticulation, but tone, look, manner of delivery, which is wholly neglected by the moderns, but which the ancients esteemed and cultivated as if it were the very soul of eloquence. Where that does exist in any considerable excellence, accompanied by real power of vigorous composition, moderns are as ready to go along with it as the ancients were. What, for example, is bolder in all antiquity than Chatham's celebrated speech on the means employed by the ministry to suppress what they termed an unnatural rebellion? When he invoked the genius of the British Constitution, and personified and animated the very portraits of illustrious patriots which surrounded him, he trod upon that dizzy verge which distinguishes the sublime from the ridiculous. But he trod it like a god. The Peers were electrified. They breathed under the momentary spell of the eloquence of Cicero or Demosthenes;—and instead of being revolted at this imaginary insult to modern reason and good sense, they rather looked

to see the Genius of England rising in the midst of them, and turned with expectation to their invoked ancestry starting from the walls. Chatham was a true orator; the greatest, probably, of the modern world;—for what must we think of that almost super-human power before which Mansfield, the gifted and accomplished Mansfield, second in oratory only to him, was literally impotent and awe-struck?

The comparative degree of opportunity for preparation also seems to me greatly overstated in estimating the qualities of the ancient and the modern orator. We are apt, without reflection, to imagine that the compositions which we read, and which are so carefully elaborated, were wholly written out before delivery, as a clergyman writes his sermon, and that they were only spoken *memoriter* instead of being read,—said, instead of being sung. But the multiplicity of business in which Cicero was engaged, and the nature of that business, would have rendered this as impossible, if desirable, for him, as it would be in modern times. For, in the trials which he attended daily, witnesses were often to be examined *vivâ voce*, as in ours; their testimony was to be the foundation of his argument; and the arguments of opposite counsel were to be noticed and replied to then as now. Of the Consular Orations we know historically, that most were composed on brief preparation, and some without opportunity of a moment's forecast. Take those against Catiline, for example. The first was provoked by the unexpected entrance of the conspirator into the Senate Chamber, and spoken upon the spot. The second was delivered to the people on the following morning. The occasion of the third was a decree of the Senate following upon the reading of certain intercepted letters, to explain which decree Cicero went immediately from the

Senate-House to the Rostra and harangued the people. The fourth was in the Senate, on the following morning, at the close of a debate, on the question of death or banishment for the conspirators. So the Philippics against Antony were all, or nearly all, the offspring of sudden occasions. The compositions, therefore, which we read are only the author's careful reports of his own speeches, subsequently prepared for publication, much as is practised in modern times.

Of Demosthenes it is recorded, that some of his best efforts were wholly unpremeditated. Parts of the celebrated oration on the Crown were evidently so, being not only direct reply, but citing even the very words of his adversary who had just spoken. And why doubt what Demosthenes himself is reported to have said in relation to speeches which he had opportunity to prepare? that he neither wrote the whole, nor spoke without having committed parts to writing. A practice which has undoubtedly been followed by some of the most distinguished modern orators on important occasions; and which, if more generally pursued, would probably contribute much to elevate the character of modern eloquence. "*Stylus optimus et præstantissimus dicendi effector ac magister.*" This was the opinion of Cicero. And the present Lord Chancellor of England has said, "I should lay it down as a rule which admits of no exception, that a man will speak well in proportion as he has written much." Yet who practises such discipline with us?

What then was it, beyond native power, which gave to these ancients their extraordinary eloquence, agreed to have been superior to that of the whole modern world? For we cannot admit that the capacity of man for this species of composition has deteriorated; nor that modern audiences are incapable of appreciating true

eloquence when they find it ; nor that suitable themes and occasions and opportunities for it do not arise in the course of modern affairs. Must not the whole answer be, if the effect of civil government be set aside, difference of education and greater cultivation of the oratorical art ? And this answer stands recorded in their works. What their scheme of education was, is no secret. We know, because they have told us, that their education was directed to this end from infancy. Their minds were indeed nobly stored with the treasures of science, philosophy, and history, as well as poetry and belles-lettres, belonging to their age ; but the attention was mainly devoted to language, its power, its use. In their earliest years they were taught to read, not merely by the eye, but for the ear. Before they were of age to compose, they learnt to speak. They cultivated the memory of language to the utmost. They studied the power of the human voice and all the minutæ of effective delivery. Advancing in age, they composed, not rarely, but daily. Next they declaimed their own compositions ; and this too was a daily exercise, not slightly performed, but subjected to rigorous criticism both as to style of composition and style of delivery. Finally they composed and declaimed extemporaneously as a constant exercise in the same critical manner. These studies they never abandoned. Cicero, late in life, tells us that it was, and always had been, his rule, never to let a day pass without writing. After he was largely engaged in business, we find him still declaiming daily. And to such degree of accuracy and minuteness did he think it worth while to have studied the Greek writers and acquired their language, that, for the sake of better criticism from his Athenian masters, he used to declaim extemporaneously in Greek. Probably the ancient orators, when

preparing for important causes, selected for subjects of composition and declamation such topics as were likely to arise there for actual discussion. Consequently these men brought to the real contest not only habits of accurate and choice composition, but a store of rich materials collected for present use ; minds, not only full-fraught with various learning, but pregnant also with striking thoughts and expressions appropriate to the cause, and which, from their familiarity, would naturally present themselves in extemporaneous composition, flowing into use as occasion should make them suitable and effective. In short they made eloquence their study as no moderns do, and were prepared for it by their whole course of education as no moderns are. With this fact staring us in the face, is it not idle, is it not unphilosophical, to search for remote causes of inferiority in modern eloquence ? Here is one plain, adequate, unquestionable, known cause. Why should not the same means applied to the human mind now produce, under a free popular government, equal effects ? Who can doubt that great cultivation of the natural talent and genius of the people would lead to great results ? Who shall measure those results ? Who can doubt at least that vast improvement would be effected ?

Does not the whole question then come to this, whether in the present state of the world there is sufficient motive for such cultivation of this art ? Its immense importance in a public view has been already glanced at. But is there sufficient motive to the individual ? And when we look at the greatness of the rewards of eloquence in antiquity, when we see Cicero loaded with offices and honors, swaying, while the constitution and the laws prevailed, the whole destiny of that imperial republic, the mistress of the world ; when

we contemplate his ample fortune, his Roman palace, his eighteen princely villas, his magnificent libraries, his costly works of art, and reflect that these were all the lawful fruits of his eloquence and the voluntary offerings of those whom its patronage had served, we are indeed lost in amazement at the splendor and magnitude of ancient munificence, and sensibly struck with the comparative meanness and poverty of all modern excitements. But reverse this picture. Behold Cicero banished, his estates confiscated, his houses demolished, his wealth plundered, himself finally murdered by the enemies whom that eloquence had roused, and we shall see the magnitude of the rewards counterpoised by the magnitude of the dangers. All things in life must be measured by some relative standard. Looking upon the scale of the ancient world, we see the same magnificence of wealth showered upon eminent soldiers, illustrious statesmen, distinguished artists, actors even, the *élite* of all conditions. The plunder of Asiatic provinces and the spoils of captive princes loaded the car of the conqueror, and were heaped upon all the favorites of the people. The riches of the earth were Rome's; but her laws and customs accumulated them in the hands of a patrician few, while the great body of her people were miserably poor and oppressed. Under modern, and especially American institutions, we are blessed with more of equality and a juster graduation of all things; there is neither such abject excess of poverty on the one hand, nor the same overgrown superfluity of wealth on the other. And looking with an eye accustomed to the modern scale, comparing the rewards of distinguished orators with those of other men, in respect of consideration, wealth, influence, and political power combined, and considering the inestimable addition of value which

increased security of property, life, and liberty confers on all earthly possessions, who shall say that eloquence is not now as highly estimated as it was of old, and that its whole relative recompense is not still a sufficient excitement to honorable ambition?

In the ancient republics eloquence and arms were the only honorable avenues to political power. Are they not still the favorites of the people? Wealth, the general pursuit, was yet a constant object of jealousy and suspicion. The people were always prompt to see the dangers of their own pollution from that source. He is rich! He is rich! *Hunc tu, Romane, caveto!* Beware of corruption! Your liberties are bought and sold! Such was the cry of demagogues, in Rome, against that monster — wealth. But the flourish of popular oratory, and the glitter of arms, a few bursts of eloquent patriotism, or some slight, yet enduring, memorial of personal exposure in the public cause, these, in the Grecian and Roman republics, were titles of irresistible merit to every office and honor which the people could bestow. — And mark well the difference, for it is greatly remarkable, that however petty orators in ordinary times may have fomented the spirit of faction, stirring up tumult and disaffection by arraying the poor against the rich, yet, in the crisis of real difficulty and danger, the mighty masters of eloquence uniformly stood forth champions of liberty, bold vindicators, stern upholders of the constitution and laws of their country; while these, invariably, after being often endangered, were ultimately subverted and swept away through the blind devotion of the populace to some military chieftain. How much of political wisdom has man gained by the experience of twenty centuries? Much in this; — that, although his eye is still dazzled by the brilliance

of arms, and his heart easily seduced by the fascinations of military glory, yet his more sober judgment does, upon the whole, estimate this species of renown more justly than it did amidst the spoils, ovations, and triumphs of more classical but barbarous ages. The passion for war has sensibly declined. It is yet declining. With it must necessarily decline all undue influences of mere military fame. But the power of genuine manly eloquence, founded as it is on ultimate principles in the constitution of man, friendly to the preservation of his political rights, consonant with the moral beauty and dignity of his nature, must for ever maintain its ascendancy over the hearts of the people. Let him, then, who is ambitious, honorably ambitious, of popularity and political power, in the modern republic, give his days and his nights, his youth and his riper years, as those ancients did, to the study and perfection of this greatest of human arts.

It has not been my purpose to go into a consideration of the general scheme of education which would best conduce to this end. My whole object is to impress upon all who hear me, so far as my feeble ability may permit, the vast practical importance of bringing up our classical learning, here in New England, to the mark of true scholarship ; and especially for its effect upon the writing and speaking of the country. For I hold it to be the dictate of reason, confirmed by all experience, that the early education best adapted to produce accomplished writers and accomplished speakers, is that, which, while it sharpens and invigorates the faculties, while it settles habits of attention and investigation, gives the most accurate knowledge of the construction, power, and harmony of language, with the greatest command of it in choice and arrangement of words, fills the memory most

copiously with noble sentiments, agreeable images, and striking turns of expression, and most kindles in the youthful soul that enthusiasm for liberal pursuits, and generous ardor in the cause of regulated liberty, which so distinguished those admirable ancients. What has yet been discovered or invented by man, which so well answers all these ends at once, as accurate study of the ancient languages, and familiar acquaintance with their glorious literature? Is this all theory? Do you want practical proofs? Shall I point to examples then?

“Hence to the famous orators repair,
Those ancient, whose resistless eloquence
Wielded at will the fierce democratie,”

and those modern, too, whose names are names of eloquence itself. Time would fail me, were I barely to run through the illustrious catalogue, and point out the distinguishing fact in the life and education of each, which bears upon the illustration of this truth. Look for yourselves at those departed orators of England, who stood preëminent, *longo intervallo*, in the ranks of eloquence, parliamentary or forensic, and you will find not one out of the host, who was not deeply imbued with classical literature; scarce one who was not so accurately instructed in the ancient languages, as to be a scholar among scholars; not one, who did not extensively study language and eloquence. I select Charles Fox and William Pitt, because, while they illustrate equally with others the main point of these remarks, they are at the same time peculiar and striking examples of the effect of a general system of education directed to the purpose of creating orators and statesmen. For, in the persons of Lord Holland and Lord Chatham, the world beheld the singular spectacle of two rival political leaders educating their children expressly to be, what

both became, the first parliamentary orators of their age, and premiers of England. And, to accomplish this purpose, both these distinguished parents, themselves practical orators, Lord Chatham certainly one of the greatest that ever lived, concurrently judged, that the strength of youth should be expended in acquiring accurate knowledge of the ancient languages and extensive learning in Greek and Roman literature.

Fox was one of the best Grecians in England; accurate enough, after he had reached the full height of his parliamentary fame, at an age when most men have forgotten this half-learned knowledge of their youth, to cope with Wakefield, that famous and professed philologist, in criticism on the merest niceties of Greek prosody and dialect. From the correspondence between them it appears, that Fox was amusing his leisure in the country with reading the Greek tragedians without commentary or translation, while he was constantly citing *memoriter*, because he had not his Homer by him, verses from all parts of the Iliad and Odyssey to illustrate his critical remarks. The learned tutor of Pitt has recorded, that, when his pupil first came to him at the age of fourteen, his proficiency in the learned languages was probably greater than ever had been acquired by any other person in such early youth. "In Latin authors he seldom met with any difficulty; and it was no uncommon thing for him to read into English six or seven pages of Thucydides which he had not previously seen, without more than two or three mistakes, and sometimes without one. And *after that*," says Dr. Prettyman, "he became deeply versed in the niceties of construction and peculiarities of idiom, both in the Latin and Greek languages." He adds, "There was scarcely a Latin or a Greek classic of any eminence, the whole of whose works Mr. Pitt and I did not read together."

Look at those who have been most distinguished among the orators of our own country, and you will be struck with the same fact ; not to the same extent, indeed, (though James Otis was so exact a scholar as to have written treatises on Greek and Latin prosody,) still, in general not to the same extent, because our means of early education have been inferior ; but you will find all who have attained great eminence, with the single exception of that phenomenon of orators, Patrick Henry, good classical scholars for their age and country. I grieve at the distinction ; but it has existed and exists. You will find all of them, at some period, students in these niceties of language ; some, late in life, laboring in classical literature to repair the imperfect education of their youth. And since Patrick Henry stands a solitary exception to the whole current of example, one singular fact should be noted, which is among the best authenticated of the imperfect traditions of his early history. It is this ;— when at last he began to read, somewhat late for the commencement of an education, and then reading in the spirit of idleness and for mere amusement as it seemed, one of the books which happened to fall into his hands, and upon which he immediately fastened with delight, was a translation, for he could not read the original, of the oratorical Livy. This history became his standing favorite. He was in the habit of reading it over and over, again and again. And thus, as his classical biographer with reason conjectures, he derived at second hand from Rome his first notions of that peculiar oratory for which he was afterwards distinguished, and much of that Roman magnanimity, enthusiastic love of country, and ardor of liberty, which gave soul to his eloquence.

But why this to us ? Have we yet an education to

perfect? Are we so ignorant or insensible of the value of classical literature, or of its necessary precursor, accurate instruction in the learned languages? Or are we an association of tutors and pedagogues, to be held responsible for the defaults of the age?

Little, indeed, would it become one of the least informed among you in that learning of which I have ventured to speak, not certainly from any present familiarity, or even past accuracy, in these studies, but rather from an old and hereditary regard for them, coupled with a deep conviction of their substantial value and neglected merit, to address these remarks to *you*, otherwise than as claiming your interest in a great public cause. If there be any thing in the argument to which you have thus patiently listened;—if it be true, that science and those departments of learning, the utility of which is most directly and superficially apparent, will be cultivated of course among us, falling in as they do with the immediate and pressing demand of the time, and of the people in all times;—but that letters and the fine arts require to be fostered and cherished in this republican soil with peculiar and extraordinary care, lest they should fall into utter neglect and oblivion;—if it be true, that these liberal pursuits do indeed elevate, dignify, and adorn the character of men and of nations;—if it be true, that our government is built upon public opinion, and that opinion is controlled by the tongue and the press; that effective writing and effective speaking are, or should be, leading objects of republican pursuit and youthful instruction; and that classical learning and literature are the best foundations of an education conducted with these views and for these ends;—if there be anything in this argument, if it be not all error, all fallacy, I appeal to you, gentlemen, whether there is not need of great and substantial reform.

There is no end to the invention of new and visionary schemes for the infusion of learning without labor, of knowledge without discipline, into the young and growing mind. There is no end to the diversity and multiplicity of objects proposed for youthful pursuit, in the vain attempt to make absolute infants overtake the modern steamy flight of full-grown intellect. But if these schemes are, in truth, visionary and baseless, our course is partly to retrace our steps; — to begin again with the slow toil of laying broad and deep foundations, stone by stone, for the Athenian structure we would raise, firm in its fair proportions, graceful in its strength. Make our youths accurate in the first rudiments of classical learning. Lead them far into the niceties of those languages which are chosen to enrich their souls. Overcome for them, at least, that strangeness and confusion which obscure a half-learned tongue. Give them to see the beauty and magnificence which lie beyond these clouds. Wake them to some sense of the harmony and grandeur of the Grecian Muse. Let the eloquence of Rome and of Athens speak to them in a voice which they will feel as well as hear. Induce them to drink largely at those classic fountains of which our fathers deeply drank, while we do but taste the scanty rills which ooze over the common path. Thus, chiefly, may we hope to raise up in the body of this great republic, men, who by their knowledge, and their power to use that knowledge, shall guide the public weal; men fitted to adorn the councils they direct; to scatter light among the people with whom they mix, and of whom they are but a brighter part; to purify and exalt the national taste, as well as to expand its intellect; to build up for us a literature which shall immortalize the people which brings it into being; and to conduct

the prosperous queen of modern republics to the head of the refined and intellectual nations of the earth.

Let it be the glory of our own Harvard, earliest nurse of American letters, best of our land in ancient or modern lore, ever foremost in the promotion of learning and of liberal arts ; be it her glory now to lead anew in this advancement of their cause. Our schools cannot choose but follow ; and if the public voice loudly and earnestly demand that these shall rival, or surpass, the best of the old world, that demand must and will be satisfied. We are now old enough, wealthy enough, I trust wise enough, to insist on this advancement. But whether we shall advance or retrograde, depends wholly upon opinion. It is ripe for impulse. The public mind is excited, restless, feverish, on this subject of education. It requires control and direction. And I call upon you, gentlemen, to control and direct it. I call upon you as fathers, citizens, patrons of our schools and colleges, assembled representatives of the whole lettered interests of New England ;—I invoke you to save us from apparent peril and disgrace. Through you, only, can the public heart be reached ;—not only for your collective strength as a literary body, but because I see among you those to whom, individually, the whole public looks for counsel and guidance in all momentous works. The cause is safe, if you will it. What greater cause, except the present salvation of our country from impending ruin, what greater cause demands your thought ? Care ye for the republic of letters ;—it is your especial trust ;—nor doubt that the republic of letters shall hereafter save the Commonwealth.

